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AD HOC COMMITTEE ON THE INDIAN OCEAN

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 422ND MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Monday, 21 June 1993, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KALPAGE (Sri Lanka)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

OPENING OF THE SESSION

1. The CHAIRMAN declared the session opened. He pointed out that the Ad Hoc Committee was meeting that year in implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/59, which requested the Committee to hold a session during 1993, with a duration of not more than 10 working days. The wider participation evident at the current session signified greater interest in the questions under consideration and potential for constructive work.

2. General Assembly resolution 47/59 requested the Ad Hoc Committee to consider new alternative approaches for a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean, taking into account the changing international situation. Further, it requested the Committee to address the complex ramifications of the issues involved and differing perceptions of those issues as well as the future role of the Ad Hoc Committee and to make recommendations for consideration by the General Assembly at its forty-eighth session.

3. In the past, the Committee had concentrated its work on preparations for the Conference on the Indian Ocean. However, in 1992 the General Assembly had felt that the holding of the Conference scheduled for 1993 with the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users of the Indian Ocean was not possible. At the same time, the General Assembly had expressed its desire to continue its efforts to achieve the goal of peace and security in the Indian Ocean.

4. The participants in the session must make every endeavour to respond adequately to that challenge. Furthermore, the current session gave the participants an opportunity to demonstrate their ability to look at the issues before the Committee afresh in the changing international situation on the basis of a comprehensive and open approach.

5. The international situation was now more conducive to making progress towards achieving the goal of peace and security in the Indian Ocean region. First, the threat of a nuclear conflict had been reduced. Second, the new international political relations had improved the climate for the littoral and hinterland States, the permanent members of the Security Council and the major maritime users to work together to achieve peace and security in the region.

6. He pointed out that, in preparing for the current session, he had conducted extensive consultations with all the members of the Committee and through the regional groups, as a result of which new ideas had emerged, and he encouraged all delegations to engage in a free and open discussion within the terms of reference for the session outlined in General Assembly resolution 47/59.

ADOPTION OF THE AGENDA

7. The agenda was adopted.

ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIRPERSONS

8. The CHAIRMAN said that one of the posts of Vice-Chairpersons remained vacant in view of the lack of a candidate from the Group of Eastern European States. The Group was currently holding consultations on that question and he would be immediately apprised of their results.

IMPLEMENTATION OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY RESOLUTION 47/59 OF 9 DECEMBER 1992

9. Mr. SREENIVASAN (India) said that his country, which had participated in the deliberations of the Committee over the years in a sincere and forthright manner, attached great importance to its current session, which should provide a new opportunity to address the complex ramifications and differing perceptions of the question of the Indian Ocean as a zone of peace and the Committee's future role.

10. The 1971 Declaration of the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace had come about in the context of the cold war and super-Power rivalry, which had particularly affected developing countries, a large number of which were situated in the Indian Ocean region. In the past few years, there had been monumental changes in the world and super-Power confrontation should be replaced by consensus on questions of international peace and security. Consequently, the Committee should consider arrangements that would ensure peace and stability in the Indian Ocean region.

11. At its 1992 session, the Committee had agreed on the need to consider new alternative approaches to achieving the objectives of the 1971 Declaration. That approach had been approved in General Assembly resolution 47/59. His delegation believed that the Committee had reached a crucial watershed in its existence, where it should engage in realistic and pragmatic efforts. It was necessary to formulate proposals responsive to the changed international situation, while keeping in mind the long-term objectives which the Committee had been established to achieve.

12. The 1971 Declaration remained the Committee's raison d'être. If, in the general opinion of its members, the Declaration had become irrelevant, the Committee should admit in its next report to the General Assembly that its original mandate had been affected by radical changes in the international environment. The Indian delegation was still of the opinion that the substance of the 1971 Declaration was relevant. It was therefore necessary to give careful consideration to a new role for the Committee based, not on immediate political impulses or short-term political situations, but rather on collective long-term commitments and common interests.

13. It had been frequently argued in the Committee's deliberations that a fundamental change of approach was required in order to encourage the participation of the permanent members of the Security Council since there could be no meaningful discussion of establishing a zone of peace in the Indian Ocean without the participation of those who had a military or naval presence in the

(Mr. Sreenivasan, India)

region. However, the question arose as to what role the Committee should play in the dialogue on regional disarmament and regional confidence-building measures. Several other forums already existed, such as the First Committee, the Disarmament Commission and structures for regional cooperation.

14. The Committee's role in the changed circumstances should be defined with care and in a measured manner, taking into account past concerns, some of which might still be relevant, and current concerns resulting from the changed strategic equation and security environment in the Indian Ocean region.

15. In discussing regional confidence-building measures, the Committee must first reach consensus on the geographical boundaries of the region, which had never been conclusively defined. The existing membership of the Committee was a direct result of the super-Power rivalry of the past in that part of the world and the threat perceived by the littoral and hinterland States. In spite of the end of the cold war, some of those trends and threats remained, for example, demonstrations of military presence. It was against that background, that the Committee must conceive its future role, if it was to continue its work.

16. During informal consultations held the previous day, the Chairman had identified elements of an alternative approach. Elements such as regional confidence-building measures and regional disarmament were extremely important for establishing an atmosphere of peace in different parts of the world. However, they could not be applied to the Indian Ocean region without a discussion of the legitimate contours of the region. One could argue that a discussion of confidence-building measures should not be restricted to the members of the Committee, who had different historical, political, social and economic backgrounds, but must be open to all the Members of the United Nations.

17. India had always supported the idea of confidence-building measures at the bilateral level and had supported regional cooperation where various factors had permitted a clear definition of regions and zones. Therefore, the nature and scope of confidence-building measures that countries might find practical and feasible to engage in with others was a matter of sovereign judgement. One could not rule out a gradual approach to confidence-building measures, depending on specific issues and the partners involved in the dialogue.

18. At the current session, the Council should undertake a careful assessment and re-examination of the 20 substantive elements for consideration at the United Nations Conference on the Indian Ocean (A/46/29, annex III). The Committee should retain those elements on the list which many of its members considered to be of continuing relevance for its work. It might need to add to that list new issues that had direct implications for peace and security in a more limited geographical context. The Indian delegation was ready to work with other delegations in achieving the Committee's objectives in a spirit of consensus-building and cooperation.

The meeting rose at 11.05 a.m.